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ABSTRACT

Sixteen general classroom recommendations for helping the learning disabled secondary school student are set forth. Among the suggestions are encouraging the student to learn through the auditory channel, grading the student on effort or signs of progress rather than on performance compared to the group, keeping written and reading homework to a minimum, providing outlets for physical activity for students with restless and distractible behavior, and assigning one counselor to follow up on all learning disabled students and their problems. (CL)

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Survival Alternatives for the L.D. Adolescen

Many authorities (doctors, educators) believe that 10% or more of American school children suffer from a neurological learning disability syndrome. These children seem to have a physiological defect somewhere in their "circuitry" that prevents them from mastering the reading, writing and arithmetic skills in the same way and to the same degree that other children can. This is not a function of intellect; these students run the range of intellectual potential just as the normal population does. Boys are afflicted more often than girls - 5 to 1 is the approximate ratio.

Unfortunately, these students have been frustrated in their school experience, and have often been branded as failures, with resulting emotional, behavioral problems. Early diagnosis and remediation is most effective. By the time the learning-disabled student has reached secondary school, he has frequently compensated for his basic problem in various ways, or has "turned off" the school experience.

Children in this category often display some combination of the following characteristics:

Inadequate spoken language
Difficulty in learning and remembering printed words
Reversal of letters or of sequence of letters in words
Persistent poor spelling
Cramped or illegible handwriting
Defective written composition
Difficulties in organizing ideas

At a workshop sponsored by the IFLD in August 1976 the accompanying material was distributed, containing practical recommendations for helping these students to cope with their classroom activities. The techniques suggested are appropriate for any student who appears to have difficulty learning at the average pace.

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General recommendations for assisting the learning disabled student in a secondary school setting.

1. It is advisable for teachers to read the permanent record of testing and anecdotal records before making referrals or attempting remediation.

2. Proper referral should then be made if the teacher considers it advisable.

3. Specific learning disability testing is suggested to determine the weaknesses and strengths of the student. Such testing is generally done by the psychologist/learning disabilities specialist within the school. If such service is not available the psychologist will make the decision whether referral outside the school is necessary.

4. Having ascertained the pattern of strengths and weaknesses some generalizations can be made with regard to the handling of most LD students. Bear in mind the fact that not all techniques work equally well with all students.

5. Generally, an LD student will perform best if work is individually geared to his <u>real</u> performance level. A screening needs to be made of materials available in each subject class with regard to the student's ability to read and comprehend such material. If the material is too difficult some alternatives must be provided.

   A STUDENT SHOULD NEVER BE REQUIRED TO READ MATERIAL THAT IS BEYOND HIS SUGGESTED READING LEVEL AS MEASURED ON APPROPRIATE TESTING!

6. A learning disabled student most frequently absorbs auditory information better than that which is taught through the visual channel. Despite difficulties in auditory discrimination of similar sound patterns, difficulties in the processing of auditory information, he will probably learn best by hearing the information in class or on a tape. Encouraging him to learn this way will help to keep the volume of reading required down to a realistic level.

7. Such students usually perform better orally than in written work. Thus orally administered tests will assist understanding of test questions and improve the ability to answer. The testing of such a student will not measure learning if the student can't read the test (or can't understand the language and vocabulary of the test).

   Often performance on tests is interfered with by lags in visual motor integration skills; it may also be affected by anxiety concerning pressure of time limit.

8. <u>Grades</u>: An alternative system of administering grades might well be considered for such students. Such grading might be based upon the amount of <u>effort</u> or signs of <u>progress</u> rather than relative performance as measured against the group. Such students might also be measured in a comparison of attitude change from previous poorer attitude to a more positive approach to work. At all times the student should be told what is being graded. He is well aware that his work does not measure up to the average in his class group, thus giving him a B or C without an explanation will make him aware of the "credibility

gap" between his honest performance and that expected of others. On the other hand, a low grade when he feels that he has done his best but is unable to read the book, or understand the exam will be interpreted as a put-down.

9. Homework:
Written and reading homework should be kept to a minimum. Oral work should be substituted for written work whenever possible. If we expect too much written work from such a student, we will turn off his efforts completely. A rule of thumb, to vary with teacher judgment might be from one-half to two-thirds reading and written work to be done at home.

10. Teacher Attitude:
The teacher's attitude is probably the most important factor in setting up a learning atmosphere hospitable to the student with a learning disability. It is more important than any other single factor in the learning situation. The attitude should be aimed at reducing tension. Some suggestions to implement this are as follows:

a) Never embarrass a student. Sarcasm is not appropriate to a class.
b) Try not to patronize a student. Try to handle him on his maturity level although he may not always act with maturity.
c) Always give the student a chance to tell his side of a story. Allow him to tell what he knows.
d) Try to avoid acting as an authority figure in a kind of power struggle. When dealing with adolescents try to appear as a friend skilled in teaching who is sharing his know-how. Take time to listen and learn rather than doing all the talking.
e) Try to avoid using words that will not be understood by the student. If they are necessary, be sure to explain them clearly. The whole content of a lesson can be lost by utilizing confusing terminology without defining it: Never assume that the student knows the meaning of the words, even if he gives an affirmative response when asked if he does comprehend.
f) When asking a question of a learning disabled student in class, try to keep his individual ability in mind. Ask the kind of a question that he can answer, if only in part. Take time to answer yes to even part of the answer, to give him positive feedback and encourage him to try again.

11. Specific Written Assistance:
A written or oral pre-outline of a lesson prepared prior to class will provide the student with a number of assists. He will be able to follow the lesson, fill in specific answers on his outline. He will be able to have clear notes on the main ideas covered in the lesson. Thus he will be able to answer questions during the class and gain status, and will have review notes with which to study rather than a book that he cannot read.

Note taking and Homework Writing:
If a child has diagnosed difficulty in visual discrimination and visual matching he may have difficulty copying sentences off the board with accuracy. He may copy pages in a homework assignment incorrectly, i.e. page 914 becomes page 614, or 941, etc. He can be assisted via appointment of a secretary, seated next to him, to either proof-read his copy or copy it for him with a sheet of carbon paper. This will help to avoid the "I had the wrong pages", "I forgot

to write the assignment down", or "I didn't see that on the board" kind of excuse.

12. Specific Motor Assists:
With students who exhibit highly restless, distractible behavior it is helpful to provide outlets for motor activity during a 40 minute period in class. If such students are allowed to spend part of the time working in library or nearby language lab when they find sitting quietly for prolonged periods quite difficult. Such behavior of a chemical or emotional origin may persist well into adolescence. Such students become hard to handle and will often act out if not allowed periodic breaks in schedule to use up some of this motor tension that they experience. Research has shown that periodic motor breaks cause learning periods (sedentary) to be more effective as the student is more relaxed. Sometimes a Jr.-Sr. High School can program an extra period of gym or motor activity to allow such tension to be worked off in a physical education class.

If no other alternative technique can be found, such students can be sent to the office during a class to gain a motor break. Teachers need to be aware of the buildup of such tension in a learning disabled student.

13. As was mentioned before, the pressure of time limit testing is a trying situation for some students. Pressure of time should be avoided whenever possible in a classroom. This means that alternate opportunities to complete an assignment, or complete an exam, need to be arranged. In one school a special proctored study hall was set up with a trained teacher aid in attendance. Any student who required extra time was allowed to go to the study hall and finish exam, or report with supervision and/or assistance from the teacher aid. The presence of/sympathetic, helpful person made many students come for advice, rap sessions and company as the year progressed.

The study-hall turned into a sort of resource room set-up in the second year of its existence. It was specially outfitted with cassette and headphone jacks, and some materials to assist the aide to be more helpful to the students. Most significant to this idea is that:

a) a well trained sympathetic person be on duty.
b) teachers take the time to explain clearly to the aide what is expected in in the assignment/test/report to be completed.
c) materials with which the assignment be completed be made available to the aide and student. Do not assume that the student will bring his books/ research sources, etc. He often forgets, or is not sure of assignment requirements.
d) the number of students sent to such a study hall/resource room be limited during any one period to no more than 3-4 at one time.

14. Study of a Foreign Language:
Where the student exhibits difficulties of auditory perception for sounds, or visual perception for sequences of letters, the study of a foreign language should be delayed as long as possible. It might even be totally avoided if the student does not want to take such a course. Note: increasing number of colleges drop their language requirement for admission and/or graduation as the years go on.

If such a student does wish to take such a language a total audiolingual approach (cassette-record) may be utilized if auditory strengths are adequate. If such a studentis in a regular language program the teacher should be included in all information concerning the type of learning disability present and how it will affect his study of a foreign language.

15. Since teacher time is limited it is helpful to have one counsellor specifically assigned to follow up on all learning disabled students and their difficulties, career ambitions, post high school plans, etc. This adviser then becomes an internal resource person who attends conferences e.g. ACLD
Orton Society

He is a resource for vocational information
(see Training Programs for young people with L.D.)
ACLD National Office
2200 Brownsville Rd.
Pittsburgh, Pa. ($1.00)

A liaison for gaining extended time on College Boards
See College Entrance Exam Bd.
~~Att.: Mrs. Fletcher~~ 609-921-9000 ext. 2879
Princeton, N.J.

16. Teachers are a key link in the chain of aid for the learning disabled student. However, they cannot achieve the desired results without a total program including sensitization of community, parents, and school administrations to the problems of the learning disabled student (see proposed community programs).